

DEVELOPMENT OF A COMPREHENSIVE OCEAN POLICY FOR FLORIDA

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Florida Governor's Ocean Committee

Background

The state of Florida is a thin strip of land measuring nearly 35.7 million acres, and bounded on three sides by the ocean. Approximately 8,400 miles of tidal coastline wrap around it, and off its southern tip lie the only living coral reefs in North America – third largest in the world. Florida's territorial waters stretch for 3 miles off the Atlantic coast and 3 marine leagues in the Gulf of Mexico, with approximately 6 million acres of submerged lands underneath. Without doubt, Florida's ocean is its most distinctive feature.

Much of that distinction lies in the ocean's cultural, environmental, and economic importance. Florida's very identity is intimately linked to the ocean; millions come to the state to experience the ocean's ability to relax, rejuvenate, comfort, and inspire. In addition to its intangible powers, the ocean is literally life-giving. It is the source of oxygen we breathe, water we drink, food we eat, and medicines that maintain our health. As an economic engine, it is the basis for some of Florida's most important industries, including fishing, shipping, and tourism. But while its abilities are great and its resources vast, they are not inexhaustible. Increasing demands for Florida's ocean resources, coupled with an ever-growing ability to recover those resources, are threatening the health and vitality of Florida's ocean.

When the United Nations proclaimed 1998 to be the International Year of the Ocean, it provided an excellent opportunity to highlight the importance of the ocean to life on this planet. The proclamation spurred many efforts and activities aimed at raising awareness of the ocean's value, and encouraged individuals, organizations, and governments to look for ways to make changes needed to sustain the world's precious ocean resources.

Following that lead, the late Governor Lawton Chiles proclaimed 1998 the Year of the Ocean for Florida, and encouraged the state to focus on the importance of the ocean to its cultural, economic, and environ-

mental health. Governor Chiles also appointed the Florida Governor's Ocean Committee (FGOC). This Committee is responsible for promoting public awareness of the significance of the ocean to Florida, as well as guiding the state's efforts to develop and implement a coordinated and comprehensive ocean resources management strategy.

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This article discusses Florida's efforts to develop an ocean management approach that is coordinated and comprehensive, and that can account for a wide variety of uses and activities. It includes a brief history of the current ocean planning initiative, describes the preliminary

projects that laid the groundwork for the creation of the Florida Governor's Ocean Committee, and summarizes the Committee's work to date.

History

Impetus for developing an ocean management strategy for Florida began with the Florida Coastal Management Program (FCMP), which is housed in the state's Department of Community Affairs. The Program's motivation sprang from a number of factors. For example, even though in recent years the state has made great progress in terms of responsible management of Florida's coastlines and near-shore waters, management of offshore resources continues to be conducted on an issue-by-issue basis, often with conflicting and contradictory results. As the coordinating agency for the nine state agencies that regulate coastal activities, it became apparent to the FCMP that the state needs an integrated framework to manage offshore ocean resources and to eliminate inconsistencies between different agency responsibilities. Furthermore, through administration of the federal consistency review process, it became clear to the FCMP that there are conflicts between private and public activities—for example, between fishing

activities and military missile testing over the Gulf of Mexico.

In addition, the need for an ocean management structure could be seen through the analysis of important emerging trends in the state. Information from a number of sources, including the FCMP's own trend reports, Florida Assessment of Coastal Trends and The State of the Coast, has consistently maintained that pressures on coastal and ocean resources will continue to grow as transportation needs, boating activity, tourism, and population growth all increase at astronomical rates.

Finally, influences outside the state had a bearing on FCMP's decision to initiate ocean planning efforts for Florida. By recognizing the need to address "deep blue water" issues, Florida joined the efforts of several other state coastal management programs, including Oregon, California, Hawaii, Maine, Massachusetts, and North Carolina, in focusing attention on offshore resources and activities and including them in their overall coastal management efforts. Provisions in Section 309 of the federal Coastal Zone Management Act, which authorize the use of federal coastal zone funds to support ocean policy projects, helped enable the FCMP to fund a series of preliminary projects to develop an understanding and appreciation of the need for comprehensive ocean resource management. With the Year of the Ocean proclamations, the time was ripe for a policy dialogue on ocean issues.

Preliminary Projects

To give shape and direction to the ocean management effort, the FCMP funded a series of preliminary projects that were designed to provide not only baseline data on the status of Florida ocean resources, but also to generate support for ocean planning and ultimately to justify the creation of a high-level group that would be charged with developing coordinated ocean governance strategies for the state, including the means to ensure their implementation.

The first in a series of three preliminary projects is a comprehensive analysis of the status of marine law and policy in Florida. Looking Seaward: Development of a State Ocean Policy for Florida updates an earlier study completed in 1989, and is a detailed overview and assessment of law and policy related to the management of Florida's "deep blue water"

ocean resources. With financial support from the FCMP, the report was developed by the Florida State University College of Law, and provides background and perspective on ocean issues. It also summarizes the ocean management efforts of other states, reviews

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federal and state law and policy regarding Florida's ocean resources, and offers suggestions for improving the state's managerial regime.

The second preliminary project is entitled the State-wide Ocean Resource Inventory (SORI). Complementing Looking Seaward's focus on legal and policy issues surrounding ocean resources,

SORI is designed for use by the marine resource management community and attempts to provide accurate and up-to-date information about ocean resources. Funded by the FCMP and developed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's research arm, the Florida Marine Research Institute (FMRI), SORI is an ArcView-based Geographic Information System (GIS). Using data compiled by and permanently housed at FMRI, SORI enables a user with World Wide Web access to view and download existing ocean resource information. While it does not contain all the data ever collected on ocean resources, it continues to grow and evolve, and is a valuable tool to help policy-makers identify what is known and what is not known about Florida's ocean resources.

While the first two projects addressed legal and policy issues surrounding ocean resources and the resources themselves, the third in the series of preliminary projects focused on ocean users and management issues related to the use and protection of Florida's ocean resources. Invited by the Executive Office of the Governor and the Florida Coastal Management Program, the Florida Ocean Policy Roundtable was comprised of state agency representatives, maritime industry professionals, and technical experts – all knowledgeable about the numerous issues facing Florida's offshore areas. The purpose of the Roundtable meetings was to encourage discussion at the state level concerning ocean resource

management in Florida and to identify current and potential problems and conflicts that result from the existing management regime. The participants identified numerous issues, including issues related to marine habitat, water quality, fisheries management, oil and gas development, boating and marine recreation, as well as legal and policy issues and conservation and protection considerations. Of the many issues identified by the Roundtable as important and in need of consideration, fisheries management and marine habitat, the development of ocean energy resources, and marine pollution were identified as top priority issue areas.

With the preliminary projects complete, the next step toward the development of a comprehensive ocean management strategy was the formation of a formal policy committee, known as the Florida Governor's Ocean Committee (FGOC). To assist the FGOC, a final discussion piece was prepared – a synthesis document entitled *Florida's Ocean Horizon*. Intended to be a coherent package that conveys the challenges and opportunities facing Florida as it develops a comprehensive ocean policy, the document describes and offers highlights from *Looking Seaward*, *SORI*, and the Ocean Policy Roundtable. While not intended to dictate to the FGOC what issues it should consider, it served as a point of departure for the Committee's discussions by focusing on the three priority issue areas as identified by the Roundtable.

The Florida Governor's Ocean Committee

The Florida Governor's Ocean Committee was created by executive order on January 9, 1998. The Committee is composed of 24 members representing government, conservation, education, science, recreation, and business interests. The FGOC is chaired by University of South Florida President Betty Castor. It is assisted by 6 ex officio members representing federal agencies, and is staffed by the Florida Coastal Management Program, Florida State University, and 1000 Friends of Florida. Process design and facilitation services for the Committee's meetings are provided by the Florida Conflict Resolution Consortium.

The FGOC is charged with several important responsibilities including identification of instances where current responses to ocean issues are inadequate or conflicting; development of strategies that address those inadequacies or conflicts; improvement of coordination of management efforts by local, state, and federal governments; and, finally, promotion of

public awareness of the importance of the ocean to Florida.

The first challenge facing the FGOC was how to organize its consideration of Florida's many ocean issues. Consequently, considerable effort was put into developing a structure for the Committee's discussions and a process for formulating a package of recommendations to the Governor. Using the priority issues identified by the Ocean Policy Roundtable as a frame of reference, the discussion of the issues was organized into three broad issue areas: environmental protection, living marine resources, and economic development. In addition, issues related to intergovernmental coordination and public outreach and education were added to the Committee's work plan.

The Florida Governor's Ocean Committee met for the first time in February 1998. The Committee's work is being conducted in two phases. Phase I, recently completed, explored the issues related to environmental protection, living marine resources, economic development, intergovernmental coordination, and public outreach and education through the course of five full committee meetings and numerous small working group meetings. The result is the development of two documents. The first, entitled *Florida's Ocean Challenges*, is a companion to the Committee's earlier discussion piece, *Florida's Ocean Horizon*, and serves as the Committee's interim progress report to the Governor. The report describes what the Committee sees as Florida's "Ocean Assets" – those resources that make a valuable contribution to the state's quality of life – such as living marine resources, recreation and tourism, ports, national defense operations, and marine education and research capacity. The report also includes what the Committee sees as "Ocean Management Challenges" – those issues, conflicts, or problems that threaten the health of Florida's ocean resources. Consideration of those ocean assets and challenges forms the basis for the development of "Ocean Management Strategies" – recommendations about actions the state can take to better manage ocean resources in a way that balances protection with reasonable and responsible use.

The Ocean Management Strategies are contained in the Committee's Draft Final Report. They are organized into five broad categories that address:

- Improving information on and understanding of ocean resources

- Creating an improved ocean management framework that is more coordinated and comprehensive
- Achieving and sustaining diverse marine ecosystems that are capable of supporting multiple uses
- Raising awareness, promoting education, and fostering stewardship of the ocean
- Facilitating greater financial support for ocean research, education, and management

Each strategy contains a number of recommended specific actions aimed at implementing the ocean management strategies, including suggestions for state agencies that should play a lead or implementing role in executing strategies and specific actions.

In addition, the Committee has proposed one "Overarching Recommendation." It recommends that the Florida Legislature create a Florida Ocean Council to provide leadership on ocean issues, coordinate ocean resource management, and identify priorities for research, education, and information needs. The Council would be a nonregulatory oversight group, with the primary purpose of providing clear policy direction on ocean issues and reducing duplication among agencies with responsibility for managing ocean resources and activities.

The Draft Final Report will be the focus of Phase II of the Committee's work, which will consist of a dedicated public outreach effort and the refinement of the draft. The draft will be presented to Governor Bush, state and federal agencies, and the public for comment and refinement in the early months of 1999. The Committee will then meet again in Spring 1999 to review the public comments and make necessary adjustments to the Draft Final Report before finalizing the report and delivering it to the Governor on June 30, 1999.

Conclusion

As of this writing, the Committee is preparing for its next meeting, during which it will reach consensus upon and formally adopt its Draft Final Report. State government is presently in a period of transition; Florida's new governor was inaugurated on January 5, 1999. With a new administration and many legislative changes, there is some uncertainty about the next steps for implementing the FGOC's work. There is, however, a surprising amount of consensus among the Committee members on what the important goals

and strategies should be. In addition, there is strong Committee support for establishing a nonprofit group to advocate for ocean issues and education. Finally, there is a move to have the FGOC appointed by the Legislature as the Florida Ocean Study Commission, with a one-year term to further refine and develop recommendations. In any event, the work that has been done so far lays a solid foundation for future efforts. Through the leadership of the FGOC, Florida stands poised to develop a truly comprehensive ocean management strategy. As a result, the state will be able to better manage its ocean resources and ensure that future generations will have a healthy, vital ocean to depend upon and to enjoy.